THE DELTA—A WATERSHED RUNS THROUGH IT

Talking points compiled by:
The Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC)
June 9, 1997

The Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC), and its 25-member Counties are unique to the geography of California. They comprise many Counties of origin within the state, as well as many other head-water Counties. It is from these Counties that the waterways of California originate. It is within these Counties that the snow packs are laid down in winter-- melt away in the spring, and yearly renew the life of the rivers. It is within these Counties that the vast timber and grazing lands provide the watershed health essential to the well-being of those rivers, and ultimately the Bay-Delta itself. It is within these Counties that the forests provide stability and cover to an otherwise fragile and transient soil mantel; which in place is a blessing, but when washed away can devastate the state's waterways. It is within these Counties that millions of people come to recreate during all four seasons. It is within these Counties that the seeds of future crops are sown in fertile soil. It is within these Counties that California's most precious groundwater resources exist. It is these Counties that are irrevocably linked to the great rivers of California and to the Bay-Delta, not by politics or by a process devised by man, but by the very laws of nature.

To complement the RCRC *reinvestment* platform and efforts, RCRC has recognized the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) Report. The SNEP Report was requested by Congress in the Conference Report for Interior and related Agencies, in the 1993 Appropriation Act (H.R. 5503), which authorized funds for a "scientific review of the remaining old growth in the national forests of the Sierra Nevada in California, and for a study of the entire Sierra Nevada ecosystem by an independent panel of scientists, with expertise in diverse areas related to this issue." (SNEP)

SNEP states the following:

"Institutions are central elements in the ecology of the Sierra Nevada because they mediate the relationship between the labor and desires of people and the Sierran ecosystems those people use. In a biological analogy, institutions—the governmental and non-governmental organizations, agreements, and regulations—constitute a key part of the life history strategy that the human species currently uses in the Sierra. Institutions are how people link themselves to other parts of the ecosystem" (SNEP)[1].

[1] *Summary of the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project Report* (Davis: University of California, Centers for Water and Wildland Resources, 1996).

"Institutions govern not only what people extract from the ecosystem—water, timber, recreations, amenities –but also how they *reinvest* in the natural capital through actions such as planting trees or restoring habitats. The extent to which institutions and policies "close the loop"—that is, mitigate the environmental impact of human activities—is a critical part of the Sierra Nevada ecosystem assessment" (SNEP)[1].

"As institutions regulate the exchanges between people and the ecosystem, they also link people who reside outside the mountain range with the ecosystem within it. Institutions that close the loop by extracting water or reinvesting (for instance, watershed rehabilitation to mitigate for habitat loss) are also closing a loop that passes beyond the Sierra to include urban and agricultural water users in the San Francisco Bay Area, southern California, and the Central Valley. Closing the loop, then, includes identifying and accounting for the values of all stakeholders in the Sierra Nevada and, regardless of their locations, and understanding how benefits and costs flow among coupled ecosystems" (SNEP)[1].

"Future policies and institutions need to transcend their "ecosystem component" status to perceive the Sierra Nevada as a set of ecosystems with links to stakeholders within and outside the range and to manage both extraction and reinvestment to ensure the long-term persistence of the ecosystem and the people that depend upon it," (the downstream--down slope beneficiaries) (SNEP)[1].

**The above references are applicable to "Area-of-Origin" and West-side Counties*

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program began in June 1995, as a collaborative effort to address a declining ecosystem, uncertain water supplies, imperiled water quality, and unstable levees in California's Bay-Delta –the region where the San Francisco Bay meets the Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta. This 738,000-acre area of channels, sloughs, and islands is a critical habitat for 120 fish and wildlife species. It also serves as the hub of California's water distribution system, supplying drinking water to 20 million people in northern, central, and southern California and irrigation water to 4 million acres of farmland[2]. CALFED has recognized that the Bay-Delta solution is part of a larger water and biological resource system, and that many problems related to the Bay-Delta are caused by factors outside the Bay-Delta or could be addressed with solutions outside the Bay-Delta.

[2] CALFED Bay-Delta Update, September 1996

It is paramount that this collaborative effort to restore the Bay-Delta does not benefit one ecosystem to the detriment of another. RCRC advocates that ecosystem restoration programs as part of the CALFED process are implemented consistent with the CALFED solution Principles. One of those Principles provides that the Delta solution will not be achieved through redirecting impacts from one geographic area to another. In this regard, RCRC supports restoration plans and/or projects that would restore the Delta ecosystem, so long as they are consistent with this Principle. Therefore, RCRC believes that Bay-Delta restoration plans must include those watershed areas both above and below the dams in an equitable manner.

In order for CALFED to implement restoration plans and/or projects for the recovery of species that have become endangered or threatened, CALFED should not ignore the implementation of restoration plans and/or projects for the areas above the dams necessary for the recovery of these species. For example, the following fish have lost on the average an approximate 90% of their historic habitat (spawning and rearing) in the Sierra due to the dams and the degraded ecosystem conditions above the dams: Steelehead have lost 100% of their habitat, and are presently being listed; the Spring -Run Chinook have lost 95% of their habitat, recently listed February 24, 1997 under Senator Hayden's petition; the Winter-Run Chinook have lost 95% of their habitat, they are listed; the Fall-Run Chinook have lost 80% their habitat, they are dependent upon hatcheries; the Late-Fall Run Chinook have lost 85% their habitat, they are considered a "species of special concern."

RCRC intends to promote the recovery of these natural habitats through watershed management programs that produce a variety of benefits to downstream users.
Most watershed management programs are designed to accomplish at least the following:

> *improve water quality, reduce potential for catastrophic wild fires, improve riparian habitat, reduce erosion and downstream sediment loads, restore stream banks and down-cut channels, reduce both point and non-point source pollution, restore meadow ground water tables and time-shifting of accretion, and run off from spring to summer months through non-structural methods of flood management, and potential increase in water yield.*

Based on the premise that the watersheds are interconnected with the Bay-Delta -- the life channel or the umbilical cord so to speak, watershed management programs not only increase the natural, social and financial capital of upstream regions, but they also increase the natural, social and financial capital of downstream regions as well.

Examples:

- by decreasing erosion and downstream sediment loads, we increase reservoir capacity or flood storage capacity, as well as protect water quality.
- by shifting the timing of water accretion and potentially increasing water yield, we increase water supply for upstream users and downstream users. More importantly, we increase water supply for upstream environmental uses and downstream environmental uses.
- by reducing both point and non-point source pollution, we protect water quality.
- by reducing the potential for catastrophic fires, we provide a variety of environmental and economic benefits to all. For example, by reducing the likelihood of a catastrophic wildfire we protect our water quality, prevent erosion and downstream sedimentation, ground/soil sterilization, protect air quality, and the loss of natural resources. On the economic side, we prevent the loss of natural resources, and millions of taxpayers' dollars spent fighting such an event.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program seeks to find solutions to the problems within the Bay-Delta system. This process has identified numerous problems within the Bay-Delta itself and has recognized that solutions to solving those problems will not be geographically limited to the legally defined area of the Bay-Delta. This recognition, and the process which will implement programs to solve the Bay-Delta problems should serve the long-term interests, and provide benefits to all of the people of California.

Environmental interests have argued successfully, in and out of court, that treatment of a resource must occur in a broad comprehensive manner, rather than in a narrowly defined set of permit or authorization processes. To underscore their point of the interrelated nature of the environment, as well as to point out the potential for other heretofore unidentified parties of interest they have utilized the Public Trust Doctrine. The underlying premise of the Doctrine is that the air, running water and other critical resources are held in trust by the state for the ultimate benefit of all of its people.

With the CALFED process, we expect that the Public Trust will be balanced holistically – not leaving upstream and downstream ecosystems to wither and die. The Bay-Delta cannot be made whole that way.

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